

Exhibit 7



Councilman and Wife Arrested in Voter Fraud Case

By JOE MALINCONICO / PATERSONPRESS.COM

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PATERSON, NJ Councilman Rigo Rodriguez and his wife, Lissette, were arrested at their home just before dawn on December 2 and charged with witness tampering in connection the Attorney General's probe into Rodriguez' disputed victory in May's city council election. Also arrested on the same charge was Rodriguez' campaign manager, Juan Jimenez, 45, of Paterson.

So far, 14 people have been arrested in the investigation focusing on an election which Rodriguez initially lost by six votes and then won by 41 after a recount tallied 49 absentee ballots that had not been included in the original result.

On November 30 and December 1, authorities arrested 11 people on election fraud charges, alleging they tampered with absentee ballots. The charges against the 38-year-old Rodriguez, his 31-year-old wife and Jimenez allege that once they became aware of the probe into the disputed election, they began coaching political supporters - including those arrested earlier this week - in preparation for their interviews with investigators.

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"They instructed these individuals as to how best to answer the and, in fact, how to lie to police," said Paul Loriquet, spokesman for the Attorney General's Office.

Some of the witness tampering took place at a Paterson restaurant, Loriquet said.

The charges of voter fraud cast renewed doubt on the outcome of the council election and raise questions about whether Rodriguez will be able to stay in office. The Attorney General's Office referred such questions to Passaic County election officials

"It's not in our hands," said John Currie, chairman of the Passaic County Board of Elections. "It's up to the courts."

If Rodriguez were convicted, the verdict likely would require him to vacate his council seat, officials said. In the meantime, the candidate who narrowly lost to Rodriguez, Kenneth McDaniel, could file a legal challenge to the legitimacy of the result based on the Attorney General's investigation, officials said. McDaniel previously had tried to get Rodriguez' victory overturned, but two months ago, Passaic County Superior Court Judge Thomas Brogan ruled he found no evidence of election fraud.

The witness tampering charges against Rodriguez, his wife and Jimenez are a third-degree offense. Other charges filed against them, according to a press release issued by Attorney General Paula T. Dow and Criminal Justice Director Stephen J. Taylor.

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Those arrested earlier in the week had been "messengers" who were supposed to hand-deliver and return absentee ballots, Lorquet said. But investigators found, through interviews with people who supposedly cast absentee votes, that many had not received their ballots or had not authorized the messengers to submit their votes for them, he said. "Dozens of ballots were tampered with," he said.

Lorquet said the investigation was still ongoing. The following people were arrested on November 30 on charges of second- and third-degree voter fraud and third-degree tampering with public record: Belkis M. Cespedes, 50, of Paterson; Ana Vely-Gomez, 47, of Paterson; Lucia A. Guzman, 41, of Paterson; Inocencio Jimenez, 55, of Paterson; and Jose Ramon Ruiz, 62, of Prospect Park. In addition, Dalila Rodriguez, 60, of Paterson, and Wilson A. Torres, 29, of Paterson were arrested on November 30 on charges of third-degree voter fraud and third-degree tampering with public records.

The following people were arrested December 1 and charged with third-degree voter fraud and third-degree tampering with public records: Octavio A. Dominguez, 47, of Elmwood Park; Juana A. Gil, 43, of Paterson; Jose E. Gonzalez, 42, of Paterson; and Loudes Inoa, 37, of Paterson, according to the press release.

In addition, Ricardo A. Fermin-Cepeda, 24, of Paterson, was charged with second- and third-degree voter fraud and third-degree tampering with public records. Fermin-Cepeda is currently a fugitive.

The investigation is being coordinated by Detective Brian Murphy of the New Jersey State Police Official Corruption North Unit and Deputy Attorney General Vincent Militello of the Division of Criminal Justice Corruption Bureau.

Because the charges are indictable offenses, this case would go to a grand jury, according to the press release. Those proceeding likely would begin in several months, Lorquet said.

Second-degree crimes carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in state prison and a criminal fine of \$150,000 while third-degree crimes carry a maximum sentence of five years in state prison and a \$15,000 fine, according to the press release.

Taylor said that the Division of Criminal Justice has established a toll-free tip-line for the public to report corruption, financial fraud and other illegal activities: 1-866-TIPS-4CJ. Additionally, the [public can log on to the Division of Criminal Justice Web site to report suspected wrongdoing](#). All information received through the Division of Criminal Justice tipline or Web page will remain confidential.